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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

22 November 1967

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Comments on "An Estimate of the Vietnam Situation, November 1967"

1. We are in substantial agreement with the principal estimates made in General Taylor's paper and have no serious problems with the explicit or implied intelligence judgments contained therein. We agree that drastic escalation (Blue Option B - "All Out") would greatly increase the risk of major Chinese, or even Soviet, intervention but would probably not compel Hanoi to abandon the struggle. We also agree that a drastic curtailment of the US effort (Blue Option C - "Pull-Back") would dismay our Saigon allies, would give Hanoi considerable encouragement and hence would stiffen Hanoi's determination and, probably, its demands.

2. On the matter of negotiations, while we do not take specific issue with General Taylor, we do feel that any discussion of this issue should take cognizance of the sharp distinction Hanoi draws between "talks" and "negotiations." In recent months Hanoi has made statements indicating some interest in "talks," if the price is right -- the price being "unconditional" cessation of the bombing and "all other acts of war" against the DRV (a deliberately ambiguous phrase). We see no sign that Hanoi has any present interest in what the US would construe as meaningful negotiations.

3. The discussion of policy options gets into matters outside this Agency's purview. Any schema of options, however, cannot avoid suggesting that the range of possible alternate actions is more rigidly packaged or compartmentalized than may in fact be the case. For example, the launching

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of raids into the northern half of the de-militarized zone to clean out artillery firing on Con Thien (even if such raids traversed the southernmost portions of North Vietnam itself) would not necessarily entail the abandonment of basic Option A in favor of Option B. Similarly, a suspension or even cessation of bombing in North Vietnam (part of Option C) could be coupled with intensification rather than diminution of allied efforts in the south (i.e., part of Option A).

4. On the enemy side the same situation prevails. Without abandoning Red Alternative A -- which, with General Taylor, is what we believe Hanoi's present strategy to be -- Hanoi could seek new or improved weapons from China or, particularly, the USSR. Indeed the relatively recent Viet Cong acquisition of heavy rockets is an indication that the Soviets are already improving the Viet Cong's weapons inventory. Hanoi would almost certainly seek, and probably get, any new light Soviet weapons developed that would be effective against helicopters. Even North Vietnamese acquisition of KOMAR class patrol boats would not necessarily mean that Hanoi had adopted -- or Moscow or Peiping sanctioned -- a policy of drastic escalation.

5. Our final comment relates to the final sentence of the memorandum under discussion. Ho Chi Minh's political goals are cast in a doctrinal or institutional context, not a geographic one. Ho is not interested in imposing "northern" rule over South Vietnam as much as he is interested in imposing Lao Dong (Communist) Party control over South Vietnam. Thus a solution which gave the Lao Dong's controlled southern subsidiary, the PRP, a paramount voice in the southern government would embody almost complete fulfillment of Ho's objectives, even if technical (i.e., governmental) reunification of the country did not immediately result.

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